Table of content

Acknowledgments

To start with, I would like to acknowledge the story of how I got inspired to write about the Cultural Institutes. The narrative is also related to my application as a master degree student of Aalborg University, Denmark. Having a strong will to continue the educational chapter of my life exactly in this university, one of the steps I had to undertake was the International English Language Testing System exam – IELTS. The last component of the assessment – Speaking – was held in the British Council which takes place in Sofia, Bulgaria. While being in the hallway of the English Cultural Institute with a group of other students, nervously waiting to attend the last stage of the exam, there was an employee of the British council with few foreign visitors in a close proximity to us. Fortunately, I overheard them talking about specific cultural initiatives that the British Council undertakes. The representative of this specific institution was joyfully explaining about the significance of cultural exchange – how important it is to share cultural beliefs in the form of events, music, art, and how essential it is to learn from other cultures. For a moment, her fascinating speech made me forget about the initial purpose of my visit in the British Council as I was tremendously curious about the other functions and initiatives of the Cultural Institute, beside the IELTS exam which I was already involved and aware of. However, my name was announced for the speaking component and my thoughts shifted again to the original purpose of my presence there.

Time passed. I was already a proud master student of Aalborg University. After going over all the challenges throughout the dynamic and adventurous semesters, it was time to start thinking about my master thesis. I had the ambition to relate the topic with something meaningful, something that played a relevant part in the path that I chose to follow. Then, somehow, the story I shared above triggered my mind and this curiosity that I developed three years ago in the British Council, dived me into a deep research on the matter of Cultural Institutes.

Therefore, I would like to acknowledge that by paying attention to the surrounding, to what the British Council's employee had to say and offer, I developed a compassion and curiosity about this certain matter of Cultural Institutes to eventually create a master thesis out of it.

Furthermore, I would like to express gratitude to everyone that contributed to this paper. The cooperation and support of certain deputies from the Municipality of Lovech, Bulgaria was fundamental in order to organize a focus group of individuals that work and are aware of the

functioning of Cultural Institutes. Accordingly, I acknowledge the adequate participation of everyone in the focus group – representatives of non-governmental organizations, municipal deputies, advisors and journalists.

To finish with, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the University of Ruse, Bulgaria and the Aalborg University, Denmark. The cooperation of all professors, teachers and supervisors throughout my bachelor and master studies has helped me to improve considerably my academic skills and thus the writing of the current master thesis has been much more fulfilling.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The notion of images and how images are promoted appears to be an important subject, especially in today's world where culture is reflected in values, norms and practices. The term "image" is associated with the mental perception of a person towards an object, an individual, an organization, etc. Consequently, a strong, positive image is beneficial for any institution to achieve its objectives and to imply understanding among all people of interest.

One of the actors for cultural integration has a vital part in the image-building process: the system of Cultural Institutes (CI). The chain of cultural institutions, generally established and developed by a State, has the purpose of promoting culture, language, and national knowledge in other countries (Richardson, 2012). Furthermore, the capacity of CIs functions includes the facilitation of international dialogue.

The formation of Cultural Institutes is associated with the XIX century, known as the "Belle Époque" (French for "beautiful era"). It is related to a period of optimism, international peace, certain economic development, an outbreak of colonial empires and technological, scientific and cultural innovations – the first grasp of globalization. In the climate of this period, especially in Paris, the arts flourish. Many masterpieces of literature, music, theater, and visual art gain recognition. These changes are devoted to the mutual evolution of humanity (Rearick, 1986). The "Belle Époque" is named when it begins to be considered a "Golden Age" in contrast to the horrors of the World Wars. The latter destroy the overall idea of openness and the countries isolate themselves rather than living once again the horror and suffering of a global war. The European states have to survive and become stronger by seeking for alternative solutions such as cultural supremacy. Therefore, countries such as France, U.K. and Germany are among the first to create their Cultural Institutes, each of them proclaiming similar cultural, linguistic ends. The internal and external diffusion of their cultural proudness seem to be the perfect medicine for the postwar loss of army and national identity (Furjesz, 2013).

The CIs in Europe work on the representation and promotion of national language, national culture, society, customs, cultural heritage (e.g. fine arts, films, books, and traditions). Achieving progress in the operations of Cultural Institutes is related to the organization of cultural events (exhibitions, concerts) or to the representation of national artists, writers, etc.

The institutions in question also conduce to "study abroad" programs with the purpose of drawing foreign scholars with vast knowledge to contribute to their national sciences.

For decades the functioning of CIs is associated with individual, mutually exclusive, even competitive efforts. However, a platform for international cooperation among the Cultural Institutes of EU Member States has been provided in 2006 – EUNIC (The European Union National Institutes for Culture). It is a network of European national institutes of culture and national bodies that are involved in cultural and related activities beyond national borders. EUNIC has global influence in many cultural fields and provides strong assistance for cultural relations with a system of some 2000 institute branches in more than 150 countries (EUNIC Global, n/d). Among the main goals of the international organization is to unite different country partners with the purpose of working on common European projects.

EUNIC affiliates organizations from all EU member states and adds value through its global network of clusters. The latter is a collaboration platform where at least three local offices of EUNIC members operate together. Clusters can operate nationwide or citywide and they represent not only the members present in a country, but the all EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC Global, n/d).

Therefore, providing clusters is useful and effective for the European Union, especially for smaller states like Bulgaria that would be unable otherwise to have an extensive international presence.

While holding the presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2018, Bulgaria designs the cluster "Bulgaria in Europe: 2018 and beyond" with the aim of providing support to the country's cultural relations in Europe. The platform applies a concept development workshop that encourages communication and cooperation at various levels; between municipal cultural institutions and the independent sector, between Bulgaria and its European neighbors and partners, and between the European cultural institutes active in Bulgaria. The cluster is also about raising awareness around the role of culture and the arts in Europe along with their spill-over effects and benefits within the Bulgarian society (EUNIC Global, n/d).

Consequently, it is considered that the purpose and functioning of the active European Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria (the British Council, The French Alliance Françoise, the Italian Dante Alighieri, the German Goethe Institute) are familiar to the contemporary Bulgarian society.

But are they? How extensive is the knowledge about Cultural Institutes and EUNIC in Bulgaria, and how do Bulgarians perceive images communicated by the European Cultural Institutes active within the country?

The current master thesis investigates to what extent EUNIC promotes images that are accessible to the Bulgarian people so to broaden their intercultural knowledge and understanding. The study is conducted in collaboration with a selected focus group of nine Bulgarian specialists who are working in common projects with representatives of the foreign Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria.

The goal of this paper is to find out if the Bulgarian society is sufficiently aware of how European Cultural Institutes operate within the state's territory under the common setting of EUNIC. Furthermore, it seeks to explore how the international platform of CIs share images and information to a certain nation like Bulgaria so to compel people to learn a foreign language, to study abroad, to discover a passion for the work of foreign authors, artists, etc.

Therefore, all the aspects for understanding the imposition and the dynamics of images communicated by the active European Cultural Institutes within the territory of Bulgaria are defining the research problem as:

How does EUNIC – The European Union National Institutes for Culture - function as promoter of images in Bulgaria?

- **How is the aim of Cultural Institutes comprehended by a focus group of selected Bulgarian individuals?**

Data for addressing this matter is gathered from various sources through qualitative data collection method. It includes a focus group which combines interviewing, participant observation, and group interaction. It is particularly useful for the thesis since I have the opportunity to examine the participants' reactions, gestures and reflections. The interaction between the people in the focus group elicits certain data and ideas that might not be revealed after one-to-one questioning (Stewart & Shamdasani & Rook, 2007).

The focus group is comprised of municipal advisors, journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations. They articulate that images imposed by the EU Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria are mostly associated with main cultural concepts like values, beliefs,

expressive symbols, etc. Moreover, the focus group distinguishes a difference of status between Western and Eastern Cultural Institutes as a vital factor in the perception of images within Bulgarian society. However, in the current international context, the representatives of the focus group indicate the diffusion of strong national images that are perceived by the Bulgarians as a tool contributing to the development of humanitarian values.

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction – it presents what is the subject of investigation and it explains the research setting within which the study is going to be conducted.

Chapter 2: Background information – it provides certain knowledge about the development and functioning of Cultural Institutes as the information is interrelated to the scope of the current master thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature review – it brings the findings from various fields of study that lead to identification of the gap that is explored and it sets the scope of research by also providing a conceptual model of the literature.

Chapter 4: Methodology – it discusses the different methodological approaches that are relevant for the master thesis including the abductive reasoning. The application of a focus group method for data collection is also introduced. Validity, reliability and data limitations are also included as relevant to the topic.

Chapter 5: Data analysis – it addresses the analysis of the data that has been collected and it also discusses the data within key thematic themes that have been identified in the theory and the initial conceptual framework.

Chapter 6: Discussion – it concerns the extent to which the research findings are in line with the suggested literature review. It also provides a modified, final model of the conceptual framework.

Chapter 7: Conclusion – it concludes the topic and provides implications and suggestions for future research.

In order to gain a deeper understanding on the current topic and the work of Cultural Institutes, the following chapter of the thesis presents background information on CIs. It investigates the purpose, goals and operations of the EU National Institutes for Culture.

Abbreviations:

EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture

CI – Cultural Institute

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

EU – European Union

MS – Member State

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Chapter 2: Background Information

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the role and functioning of the European National Institutes for Culture. In relation to the scope of the current master thesis, there is a greater emphasis on the outline of the British, French, German and Italian CIs, since they are the only active European Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria. However, in order to generally comprehend the CI's management, structures and budget, global network and intercultural communication activities, the paper provides information about a selection of 29 CIs from all 28 EU member states (some countries have more than one CI) that is based on an EU "Research for Cult Committee – European Cultural Institutes Abroad" (KEA European Affairs, 2016).

Collectively, CIs represent an extensive and diverse network of offices that goes beyond EU member states. Operating from within the host country is not a common practice for the Cultural Institutes, since the majority of them facilitate a system of branches abroad so as to foster international dialogue. Some of the EU CIs have been established for around a century and have thus been able to attract numerous partners from all over the globe, while other Cultural Institutes are more contemporary and their presence is limited to a few countries. The oldest and largest CIs in Europe also have the topmost number of offices abroad as the research (2016) states: Alliance Françoise (French CI founded in 1883 with 819 offices in 137 countries), Dante Alighieri (created in 1889 with 423 offices across 60 countries, the British Council (U.K. CI established in 1934 with 191 offices in 110 countries), Goethe Institut (German CI created in 1951 with 159 offices).

The structure, activities and budget of CIs overseas greatly influence their capacity to operate on the international arena. Taking into account CIs from all EU countries (KEA European Affairs, 2016), there is a contrast in terms of size, governance and operations of Cultural Institutes. The significant difference of CIs arises from the management model, the scope of their network and the amount of their budget.

KEA European Affairs (2016) defines two different management models based on the functioning of the 29 CIs explored in the research – centralized and decentralized. The centralized model of CIs stands for the institutions of a given country that can be facilitated at central level by the government while the decentralized one presents the CIs as independent organizations. Major part of the EU Cultural Institutes are branches/departments of national government ministries and their purpose is interrelated with their diplomatic operations

abroad (e.g. the Austrian and the Polish CIs). A considerable amount of CIs are independent legal entities in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the British Council, the Goethe Institut, the Danish Cultural Institut and others.

The large CIs of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy that are currently the active European Institutes in Bulgaria have various management models. The French Cultural Institute of Alliance Françoise for instance has a centralized structure with the supervision of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is following the activities of the French CIs abroad. Meanwhile, the British Council and the Goethe Institut operate with a decentralized model as NGOs, although their actions are also influenced by their respective governments.

Moving further to the CIs budgetary point of view, the EU Cultural Institutes receive funding from their national governments at central level and/or from the foreign offices they have. Despite the substantial budget that CIs maintain, a distinguishable inequality of financial resources exists between individual Cultural Institutes. Five CIs among which the British Council, the Alliance Françoise and Goethe Institut account for 93 percent of the global turnover of all the selected CIs (KEA European Affairs, 2016). Hence, the financial discrepancies have a momentous effect on the European projects that each CI undertakes.

Moreover, the financial situation of Cultural Institutes is not entirely reliable on public resources. Some of the EU CIs are financed through state subsidies while the budget of others depends entirely on the government. The large CIs (Alliance Françoise, Goethe Institut, the British Council and Dante Alighieri) that are all having active offices in Bulgaria benefit from private funding. Notwithstanding, the budget provided from the governments and the own resources of CIs vary for individual European Cultural Institutes. To illustrate, the British Council relies only on 19 percent of its finances from the MFA, accounting for the major part of its budgetary from private funding. Contrarily, Goethe Institut is having 72 percent of its finances from the German MFA.

The CIs financial point of view additionally includes certain income provided from language courses, private sponsorship, EU-funded projects, renting premises and other self-generated financial forms.

However, the concurrent maintenance of such complex, multinational infrastructure abroad is a fundamental challenge for certain CIs, due to financial pressure that their governments are dealing with as in the case of the Bulgarian MS (based on the focus group discussion of the current project).

Respectively, some CIs are looking for alternative solutions to expand their services while exploring new opportunities for funding – the use of digital technologies. The World Wide Web along with its online tools have completely changed the way certain content is composed, shared and perceived. Individuals from all over the globe have an increased access of information about European cultures. Therefore, a number of Cultural Institutes have generated online activities. For instance, the British Council and Goethe Institut are providing the general audience with digital language courses. Some CIs are also having online libraries, digital cultural projects, apps, online platforms, etc. Thus, the EU nations are able to promote their cultural production through their respective CIs while enhancing their own cultural sector with certain aspects from other cultures.

There is a great variety of culture activities organized by the CIs. KEA European Affairs (2016) outlines various examples among which:

- **Film-related events** – CIs organize their own film festivals and supply movies for European film screenings.
- **Cultural days/seasons** – CIs organize cultural projects to promote a given country and introduce a creative image of it abroad.
- **Visual arts** – CIs encourage the mobility of artists as well as the organization of festivals.
- **Literature promotion** – CIs organize poetry festivals, reading events, presentations and signings of books.
- **Design/fashion/architecture** – CIs organize and support art exhibitions, contemporary design, fashion and architecture events
- **Cross-disciplinary projects** – CIs organize international activities in cooperation with foreign cultural organizations
- **Conferences and debates** – CIs organize round tables, conferences and debates to engage in intercultural dialogue.

Furthermore, languages are an appealing mechanism for EU member states to express their cultural perspective and promote their nation. Hence, the Cultural Institutes provide teaching and education that includes language courses and language certificates. For example, the British Council organizes the world's most popular English language proficiency test for higher education and global migration – IELTS. Consequently, the language-related activities of the British Council are significant source of its income vouching for almost half of its

budget (KEA European Affairs, 2016). The CIs also grant scholarships to support students, scholars, researchers and scientists.

The Cultural Institutes constantly work on bilateral and multilateral basis among EU MS and third countries. In order to impute a more European dimension to their activities, the CIs undertake deeper collaboration both at European and host MS levels. Presently, there are 2 European networks of Cultural Institutes that operate at EU headquarters level, namely EUNIC Global and More Europe. Both of these international organizations have their dialogue with Bulgaria. However, EUNIC is chosen for the scope of this research since it is the more comprehensive one with a wider networks of institutes.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In order to, firstly, differentiate between the main objects of this study and, secondly, make interconnections and mutual dependencies, one must above all understand their meanings and trends. The theories that are suitable for this research are linked together to obtain a useful theoretical framework that will be used as a basis for the creation of a conceptual model and data collection. Since the Cultural Institutes are the engine of the thesis, it is essential to initially implement an applicable definition of culture.

3.1. The impact of culture

How can "culture" be defined? The word culture has many different meanings. To illustrate, it might refer to just an appreciation of good music, literature, art, food, etc. However, for anthropologists and social scientists, culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns (O'Neil, 2006). Accordingly, culture is a powerful human tool, but it is also a complex and fragile phenomenon. It is as much an individual and psychological term, as it is a social one. "Because culture is not transmitted genetically, it can in principle be acquired by any human being that is in the right place at the right time" (Hofstede, 1998). This definition of culture is suggested as a derivative of individual experiences. It is associated with collected knowledge from preceding stages and societies. Therefore, one can assume that certain awareness of cultural values and meanings exists in every human being as a particular technique of observation, communication, knowledge, perception.

Furthermore, people tend to look after the uniqueness and particularities of their own culture. Flint (2002) affirms that cultural identity present a global meaning of local knowledge along with sense of self, community and nation. This orientation supports the idea that individuals reflect or embody numerous cultures and that "culture" is psychologically and socially distributed in a group, in a nation. There are several studies that have closely affected profiling cultures through the usage of extensive international surveys: Hofstede (1983), Schwartz (1994) and House (2004).

The cultural dimensions' theory of professor Geert Hofstede is the most applicable for the scope of the current thesis as it focuses on social and cognitive processing with the purpose of linking culture to individuals while putting a strong emphasis on the diversity of social settings that humans encounter.

Hofstede's framework for cross-cultural communication (1983) is among the most comprehensive studies of how society's values are influenced by the culture of its members. Based on a worldwide research that includes individuals from around 60 countries, the professor analyzes employee values and develops his initial cultural model that includes four dimensions: individualism – collectivism; uncertainty avoidance, masculinity – femininity; power distance. However, a following research in China affirms Hofstede to add a fifth cultural dimension: long-term orientation (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012).

Individualism/Collectivism

Hofstede's initial conceptualization (1983) is a one-dimensional view of human values, with individualism and collectivism at the opposite ends of a continuum. Nations and cultures are defined as residing aspects of those extremes. The main principle of individualism and collectivism has helped to illuminate and explain differences among nations under the assumption that people in the same culture are largely homogeneous (Lee & Choi, 2005). As a dimension of strongly influencing thinking patterns, individualism and collectivism are vital to describe differences and form certain national images. It influences how members of a culture process, interpret, and make use of information and knowledge.

In collectivistic value orientation, people's major concern is their "in-group". According to Triandis (1989) an in-group can be defined as a group of people who share common interests and have a concern for each other's welfare, and whose members may include family, distant relatives, co-workers, and members of religious groups to which an individual belongs. People value the welfare of the group higher than the welfare of the individual. Collectivist cultures value reciprocity, obligation, duty security, tradition, dependence, harmony, obedience to authority, and equilibrium are valued in collectivistic cultures.

In individualistic cultures people are more keen on self-reliance. Thus, management is executed at individual level and relationships are neglected because of accomplishing tasks. People are supposed to take care of themselves and remain emotionally independent from the group. The individuals decide and take actions by themselves instead of with others. It is also important for a person in this culture to advance more than others and to succeed in different kind of ways. Self-interest is the dominant motivation. Independence, creativity, self-reliance, solitude, and self-actualization are valued in individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1989).

Additionally, Early and Gibson (1998) have pointed out that the individualism-collectivism dimension of cultural variation is the major distinguishing characteristic in the way that various societies of the world analyze social behavior while transferring and processing information about a nation, thus creating a certain image of it.

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance "measures the extent to which a culture can accept ambiguous situations and tolerate uncertainty about the future" (Chen & Starosta, 2005). It is further explained that the cultures, high in uncertainty avoidance, tend to be traditional, prefer methods that are already evaluated and valid. Moreover, high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer stability over change or even innovation. To illustrate, a country such as Bulgaria has an uncertainty avoidance score of 85, compared to 46 for the Unites States (Hofstede Insights, 2017). Thus, Bulgarian culture can be viewed as more risk averse and more inclined towards stability than U.S. culture.

Masculinity/Femininity

Chen and Starosta (2005) describe masculinity/femininity as the extent to which stereotypically masculine and feminine traits prevail in the culture. In masculine cultures, men are expected to be assertive, ambitious, and competitive; women are expected to be supportive, nurturing, and deferent" (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). Hence, this dimension refers to the way in which men and women are motivated towards different goals. Traditional masculine goals include: earnings, recognition, advancement, valuing material possessions, assertiveness and money. The cultural idea of femininity presents a more harmonized participation of both genders. Feminine societies are expected to be moderate, balanced as well as interested in the quality of life. The purpose of femininity includes well-sustained relationship with peers, acceptable living and working conditions and employment security (Hofstede, 2011).

Power distance

The dimension of power distance specifies to what extent a culture adapts to inequities of power distribution in relationships and organizations (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Hofstede's research (1998) identifies a distinction between those belonging to high-power-distance and low-power-distance cultures, with the former characterized by comparatively larger hierarchical gaps among individuals on the basis of differentiators such as age, sex,

generation, status, etc. In high-power-distance cultures, power tends to be more centralized and values are perceived as status and rank (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). In contrast to the prevalence of vertical, authoritarian-learning relationships in high-power-distance cultures, low-power-distance cultures exhibit much more horizontal modes of interpersonal interaction. Cultural dimensions research has resulted in the quantification of power distance scores for several countries. For example, the United States has a power distance score of 40, compared to a score of 70 for Bulgaria (Hofstede Insights, 2017). This means that comparatively, status and rank distinctions matter less in the United States, but they have a greater influence in Bulgaria's cultural and value system.

Long-term orienation

This dimension reflects the extent to which a society experience a perspective that has a future orientation instead of having a short-term point of view. Cultures with a long-term orientation are characterized by "thrift, savings, perseverance, and the willingness to subordinate one's self to achieve a goal", while life in cultures with a short-term orientation "centers on a desire for immediate gratification" (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). Additionally, short-term-orientation cultures emphasize the past, stability, universal morality, nationalism, and luck; long-term-orientation cultures place emphasis on the future, adaptability, situational morality, internationalism, and effort (Hofstede, 2011).

The study of Hofstede provides a comprehensive, qualitative base which other scholars can apply in significant selection of international topics. His theory explains the complex process of interaction between organization culture (like the chain of Cultural Institutes) and national culture (like the Bulgarian society).

Accordingly, in the matter of the current paper, the Hofstede's model along with its dimensions creates a general sense of how people in a particular society might perceive and comprehend certain cultural values communicated by EUNIC. It is important to note that the research of Hofstede is applied with the idea to discover valuable findings into the understanding of cultural behavior and cultural differences. Nonetheless, the theory is used carefully and selectively, not systematically in full since there is significant amount of academic criticism to the validity of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. To illustrate, his approach is regarded by McSweeney (2002) as rather conflicting since it conclusively makes culture more disputable that providing insights. Hofstede's conceptual major weakness, as the critique continues, is emphasized by the applied methodology on describing culture.

According to McSweeney (2002), the number of participants that Hofstede uses for his questionnaire is too insignificant to grasp the specificities of individual cultures from different nations.

Therefore, the Hofstede's research is applied in the master thesis just as an incentive when analyzing and comprehending the cultural impact of EU National Institutes on Bulgarian society. By all means, it is considered that no society is uniform and every human individual on this planet is unique, but the cultural framework can be used to provide a deep understanding of cross-cultural communication and its differences across nations.

But how do the active EU Cultural Institutes make a cultural impact by promoting images in Bulgaria? And how is the term "image" even defined?

In order to clarify these aspects, the paper provides theory on the concept of image, followed by relevant literature on national images as well as their coherence with globalization and social media.

3.2. The concept of images

Raymond Williams' vocabulary of culture and society (1985) states that similarly to "culture", "image" is among the most complicated words in the English language. It can be associated with its varied historical development and how the term is adopted.

The meaning, interpretation, and status of images are based on rich and complex history. Ancient Greek philosophy, for instance, continues to underline a great deal of writing on images in our present time. As one of the most influential passages on images in the history of philosophy, Plato presents the idea that rational thought (the "right" way of seeing) can dispel illusion, providing access to true knowledge and emancipation. By contrast, Aristotle argues that it is through forms of simulated representation and imitation that can be properly reflected on the world (Duignan, 2009). During the middle ages, images are linked primarily to the sacred. Later, with the development of modern philosophy, key statements of the term "image" emerge, concerning areas such as representation and imagination. The products of social and cultural activity begin to be seen as autonomous objects warranting special attention, which acknowledges the concept of "image" as a no simple matter to define.

To illustrate, Mitchell (1984) associate the process of imagery with a form of communication tool. The author develops this argument by naming the notable amount of things that can be

presented as images: pictures, statues, optical illusions, maps, diagrams, dreams, hallucinations, spectacles, projections, poems, patterns, memories, and even ideas as images, and the sheer diversity of this list would seem to make any systematic, unified understanding impossible.

Thus, a case-specific definition of images is to be used for the current master thesis – the diffusion of national images. The way certain nations promote cultural images can influence their international relationship with other countries. Governments become aware of the significance of systematic image creation. With the raise of globalized communication, there is a surge in national image construction. Such an image is, among others, tied up with EUNIC, the CIs and their functioning.

3.3. National images

Nowadays, the status and role of soft power is dependable on comprehensive national strength. Joseph Nye (2006) regards culture, political values and foreign policy as the essential soft power resources. The invisible soft power tends to play an important role in the social development of a country and forms certain national images that are promoted to other nations. Wang (2006) conceptualizes national images as the collective, international perception of a country's internal view of itself and its universe. His theory presents national image as a kind of superstructure that has the ability to attract and absorb others while having an important role in a country's influence. Wang (2006) further suggests that promoting national images as a "soft power" process can change other country's behavior to benefit a nation through, inspiration, assimilation and captivation. If a country's national image aims to attract other countries, the image must be advanced and keep up with time trends and social progress. Hence, national images are interpreted to be a vital step of how a nation is perceived by others and many countries undertake the practice of managing their national image. For example, the Chinese government has undertaken a number of proactive steps in the past to improve the country's national image. In 1991 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established an Overseas Propaganda Department to directly confront attacks on China's national image. Since its founding, the department has published a series of articles to address issues concerning human rights (Wang, 2003).

Furthermore, it is worth recognizing that in the contemporary world images and national images are notably influenced by social media and the phenomenon of globalization.

Therefore, these aspects are also considered as vital part of the literature review and the overall examination of images projected by the European Cultural Institutes active in Bulgaria.

3.4. The phenomenon of globalization

Globalization is being shaped by technological change. The boom in information and communications technologies forms part of the infrastructure of globalization in finance, capital mobility and export-oriented business activity, transnational communication, migration, travel, and civil society interactions (Pieterse, 2012). Accordingly, globalization can be a matter of capitalism, inequality, power, development, ecology, culture, gender, identity, population, etc. It involves boundaries of government, business and organizations, media and social movements, general and academic interest. Globalization also crosses the ideological spectrum and engages social movements and politics at all levels. It involves a paradigm shift from the era of the nation state and international politics to politics of planetary scope. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how exactly globalization is a result of human choices as well as nations and organizations, the theoretical framework requires more specific literature on the matter.

According to Appelbaum and Robinson (2005), globalization is restructuring the traditional patterns of studying the social world. A field of globalization studies is emerging all across cultural disciplines. This specific theory arises around several sets of interest that are accurate for the scope of the master thesis: Firstly, a new transnational or global cultural patterns, practices and flows, and the idea of 'global culture(s)'. Secondly, global political processes, the rise of new transnational institutions, and concomitantly, the spread of global governance and authority structures of diverse sorts. Thirdly, the unprecedented multidirectional movement of people around the world involving new patterns of transnational migration, identities and communities. Fourthly, new social hierarchies, forms of inequality, and relations of domination around the world and in the global system as a whole. Thus, globalization is not necessarily related to a natural progression emerging out of the everyday communication and interaction of people and cultures around the world. It can also result from elaborate human choice that is influenced by powerful groups of nations and corporations (Movius, 2008). Indeed, by virtue of globalization new communications and information technologies provide methods for organizations and institutions to affect the

general audience and consequently to maximize distinguishable images. The most persuasive among these methods is the role of social media and its tools.

3.5. The role of social media

Social media has turned into a buzzword in the world of institutions and organizations. On the one hand, corporate communication practitioners embrace the concept as a cost-efficient solution to seek direct communication with consumers and interact with various stakeholder groups, and, thus, influence images of organizations, institutions in a positive way. On the other hand, it is argued that the contemporary distribution of information in the Web (due to globalization) entails image risks and risk dynamics that are beyond the control and management of companies. (Li & Bernoff, 2008)

The sheer number of social media tools available to date makes their understanding rather challenging. Robert Scoble (2007) is among the first to illustrate and categorize the social media landscape, which he names "the Social Media Starfish". Among the most important tools of the Social Media Starfish are: blog; events; forums; photo and video sharing; reviews and ratings, personal social networks, etc.

Given this vast number of social media tools and services, Evans (2008) concludes that the effectiveness of so many different social activities relies on the combination of tools the audience is attracted to. Taking this assumption into account, Li and Bernoff (2008) group the activities facilitated by social media into five categories. These categories are valuable, as they describe why people use a certain range of social media, and suggest how organizations can utilize this information for image and communication activities.

The five categories of social media suggested by Li and Bernoff (2008) are described below:

1. People Creating – people create content in form of photos, videos, podcasts and texts as a way of self-expression, to enact brand relationships, and seek opinions of other consumers. Furthermore, blogging is one of the most popular social media activities. In Japan half of the online consumers are active blog readers. Therefore, social content channels are an advantageous solution for institutions to follow conversations and spot consumers' opinions about themselves or their image.

2. People Connecting – users joining social networks or online communities aim at maintaining own profiles and images, connecting to other people, and interacting with them. One key activity connected to social networking is the so-called friending, a

means to develop and maintain relationships with friends and acquaintances. Moreover, people join online communities to share information and experiences, and to belong to a certain group. Institutes can join such social networks in order to observe individuals 'conversations, increase their awareness, and promote specific images.

3. People Collaborating – collaboration encompasses the common and collective contribution of participants in Wikipedia and other collaborative websites. When coordinating and steering teamwork towards a common goal, the outcome can be effective, leading, for instance, to the creation of new knowledge and image ideas.

4. People reacting – forums, ratings and reviews are very common tools for online communication nowadays, empowering people to interact and share with each other by participating in discussions, giving opinions and illustrating experiences. This gives institutions the benefit of identifying what people like and dislike about certain images.

5. People organizing content – people can organize online content by tagging. Tagging is a way to categorize and classify, for example, photos, videos, podcasts and even blogs, helping others to find this content without much effort. Institutes can monitor how people classify and perceive the organizations in question.

The puzzle pieces that match each other illustrate that the social media tools are interconnected and cannot be observed entirely in isolation. The vast number of social media channels has to be structured and categorized in order to understand the social media's range of activities, and to comprehend their purposes. In connection to this study, this is relevant to define the range of social media activities that EUNIC undertake to enhance images.

To summarize the literature review, the concept of culture is defined within the essence of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. It is used as one of the basis to comprehend the impact that Cultural Institutions have on communicating images within the Bulgarian society. Moving forward, the concept of image is examined as another basis that is leading towards a relevant theory of national images. Last but not least, the phenomenon of globalization along with social media and its tools are stated as an additional step of the theory.

Generalizing the literature review also serves as an inspiration to create the following conceptual model, so to illustrate my perception of how EUNIC function as communicator of

images in Bulgaria and to use it as a basis for the focus group interview that I facilitated in the Municipality of Lovech, Bulgaria.
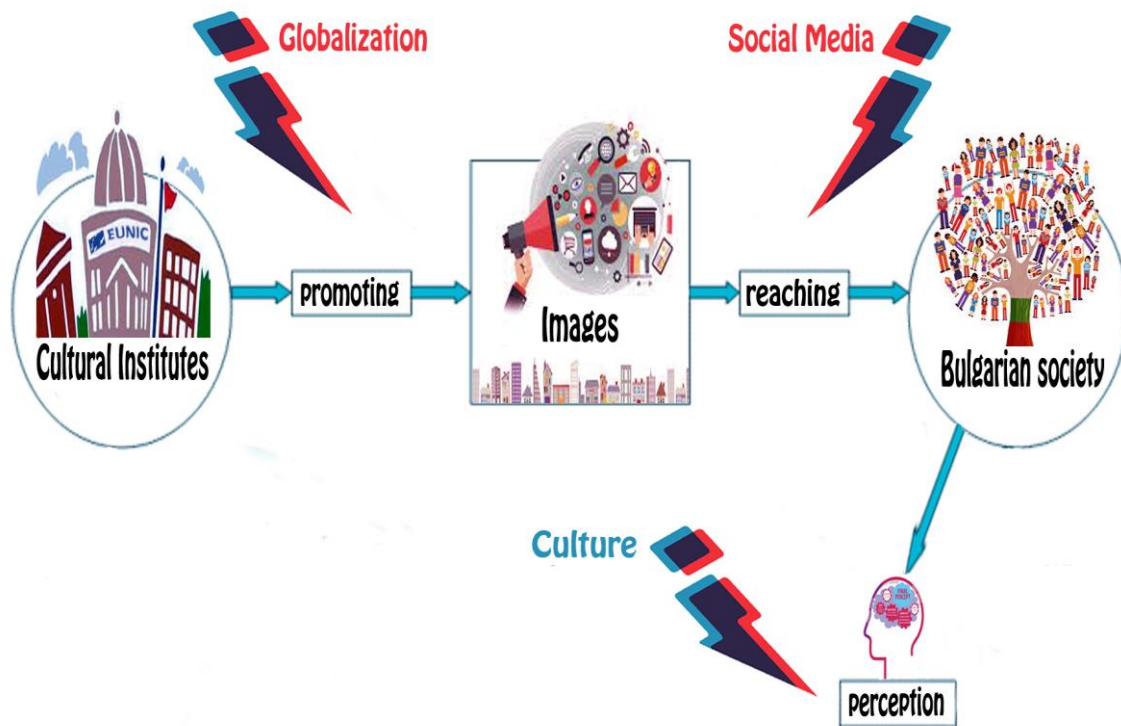
Figure 1: Conceptual model, Source: Own creation

3.6. Conceptual model

Based on the discussions that are done in the literature review, the following priory framework is established. It forms the foundation for the research of this study. The aim is to develop an understanding of the influence of EUNIC and their Cultural Institutes on communicating images to Bulgarian people. The propositions of potential relations among the factors derive from the theory of the literature review and will be further developed in the upcoming research.

The conceptual framework supposes that the case of EUNIC promoting images to Bulgarian people is affected by the role of certain factors and their influence on the relationship "people

23

- cultural institutions". The model suggests that the phenomenon of Globalization affects instantly the images that CI's promote to Bulgarian people. In this new era of technology and information, the Cultural Institutes have access to countless pieces of materials and research about a certain nation like Bulgaria, so to conceive what kind of images to share. Nevertheless, this process is bilateral since Bulgarian people can be also provided with all the necessary information they acquire for EUNIC due to the process of globalization.

Moving forward, in order to perceive knowledge and specific images of a given Cultural institutes, Social Media is illustrated as the tool that influence the imagery process of Bulgarian people. Social media has affected the way people interact with each other and the impact it has already made on the contemporary generations is completely irreversible. Social media has become a part of everyone's life and therefore, my conceptual model present it as the factor that directly affects the promotion of images from the Cultural Institutes to the Bulgarian society.

The last stage of the framework indicates that the Bulgarian society's perception of images promoted by EUNIC is influenced by Culture. The way Bulgarian people comprehend certain images might be shaped by their acquired cultural understanding and knowledge that is based on personal experiences. Therefore, the cultural dimensions of Hofstede are also taken into consideration when evaluating cross-cultural communication and more specifically the cultural perception of Bulgarians.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The philosophy of science is concerned with all the assumptions, foundations, methods, implications of science. This discipline sometimes overlaps epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, when it explores whether scientific results comprise a study of truth. Though scholars often contribute to the field, many prominent scientists have felt that the practical effect on their work is limited. A quote attributed to Richard Feynman (2009) states that philosophy of science is about as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds. Craig Callender (2010) responds in defiance of Feynman's argument by suggesting that ornithological knowledge would be substantial asset to birds, if it was possible for them to acquire it.

In agreement with Craig Callender (2010), the "ornithological knowledge" of this paper or as usually named Methodology is to be carried out in the following way: firstly, epistemology is introduced along with the perspective of interpretivism. It is considered as the most useful philosophical movement for the purposes of this research. Furthermore, in order to understand the contemporary social world from an interpretivist point of view, theory on phenomenology is also applied. Afterwards, the constructivist perspective of Bryman (2012) is the theory implemented as the ontological position of the master thesis. The chapter continues with an explanation of abductive research approach and its application to the thesis. Research methods, data collection and data analysis are the next step of elaborating on the research approach of the topic. It contains detailed information about the application of a focus group and more specifically outlines the purpose for choosing the selected 9 individuals so to relate them as Bulgarian public. Last but not least, data validity and reliability along with the limitations of the project are considered.

4.1. Epistemology

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005) defines epistemology in its broad sense as features related to the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry. Hence, the purpose of epistemology is to clarify what individuals apprehend as knowledge, as learning and understanding that is based on their acquired experiences of everyday life. It also seeks to explain how certain knowledge is applied and why it has the features it does.

There are various epistemological approaches, based on the complex relationship that exists between knowledge and the objects of knowledge. The core ideas behind each epistemological

philosophy differ. Therefore, the current master thesis includes the viewpoint of interpretivism as it is the most appropriate epistemological stance of what constitutes as knowledge.

4.1.1. Interpretivism

The position of interpretivism in relation to epistemology can be described as the believe that the reality is multiple and relative. The aim of an interpretivist approach is to perceive and comprehend the meanings of human behavior instead of predicting and generalizing causes and effects (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Neuman, 2011). Hence, it can be said that interpretivism examines the multicultural communication and interaction of people from different social backgrounds. This leads to the fact that certain cultural values can be understood by learning from people's ideas, behavior, thinking, etc.

Subsequently, for the purposes of this research epistemology is considered from the interpretivist perspective. The aim of this paper is to reach comprehension regarding certain social world and generating meaningful knowledge means to adopt the interpretivist approach. Interpretivism looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world. In the case of this master thesis it would mean that in order to understand how the active European cultural institutes impose certain images for the Bulgarian public, opinions of Bulgarian individuals who participate in the cross-cultural communication process with EUNIC have to be collected and analyzed. Moreover, the intellectual heritage of interpretivism for this study also includes the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition.

4.1.2. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them. It seeks to explore the internal logic of a given subject.

Natanson (2008) claims that the initial application of phenomenological ideas to the social sciences is attributed to the work of Alfred Schultz and states the following: "*The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs, they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behavior by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order*

to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men [and women!], living their daily life within the social world."

Consequently, it is a matter of social scientists to gain access to individuals' "common-sense thinking", to interpret their actions, motives and the social world from their own point of view.

It is this particular feature that made me claim allegiance to phenomenology. Beside the fact that sociality is a main topic in phenomenology, there is also a constant emphasis on the importance of examining the world and the social reality on daily basis. Therefore, following the logic of the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, the focus group discussion generates knowledge that is essentially a product of human activity. It is based on the experience of the focus group participants and their interaction, communication and perception of the EU Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria. Hence, the CIs promotion of images and information in Bulgaria according to the 9 individuals is not perceived as a permanent and objective external reality.

4.2. Ontology

The definition of "ontology" is derived from the Greek form ων/on/ which means "existing". While epistemology is associated with the foundation of knowledge, ontology concerns the nature of knowledge and reality (Morrison & Cohen & Manion, 2011). Hence, an ontological

Bryman (2004) identifies two ontological positions concerning social research, 'objectivism' and 'constructionism'. According to the author, objectivism encompasses certain external social reality that is not connected with the scholar's social experience. Contrarily, constructionism vouches for the social experience of the scholar in order to develop social constructions based on everyday experience and interaction with various social actors. Bryman (2008) develops his theory further by stating that constructivism infers the continuous change and modernization of the existing social structures when taking various cultures for example.

Following the logic of constructivism, the current thesis views the ontological suggestion that categories such as organization/institution and culture are pre-given. Thus, the cultural dimensions' theory of Hofstede, as one of the most comprehensive studies for cultural values of individuals from different nations, is applied with the purpose of having certain insights about the diversity of social settings that a specific cultural society (the Bulgarian one) encounters. However, the information about CIs provided by the Bulgarian participants of the focus group might differ from the existing structures and aims of the institutions in question.

Hence, as the constructivist logic implies, a specific version of social reality based on the discussion with the selected group of people is to be presented in the paper, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive.

4.3. Abductive research approach

There are various approaches to apprehend the integrated research design of a paper. There is a common understanding among scholars that deduction, induction and abduction are three of the main research approaches (Khemlani & Barbey & Laird, 2014).

The current paper represents a typical example of abductive reasoning. The abductive approach is a distinctive type of qualitative research that assigns to the process of generating social scientific accounts from social actors. Technical concepts and theories are acquired from certain clarifications of social life (Blaikie, 2000). Hence, the abductive approach refers to the development of already existing theories that are grounded in specific interpretations of individuals from the everyday life. Furthermore, the abductive method allows to go "back and forth" between theory and practical knowledge until the theory in question matches reality, i.e. they are interconnected (Dubois & Gadde, 2014).

Thus, the more specific implication of the abductive approach within the master thesis's scope serves the purpose of enriching and modifying my conceptual framework after the clash of applied theories and empirical research. It seeks to provide understanding of how certain knowledge regarding Cultural Institutes is produced and reproduced by selected social actors – a focus group in the case of the current paper. Sticking to the abductive reasoning, the social world is currently examined and interpreted by a group of 9 individuals from Bulgarian origin. They represent the social actors from the inside since the topic relates the communication of EU Cultural Institutes to the Bulgarian public. The discussion with the focus group participants introduce predominantly implicit, mutual knowledge that is building upon the theoretical perspective of the project and how I initially imagined the promotion of images from the EU CIs to the Bulgarian MS. In particular, the information about the East-West dimension of Cultural Institutes, provided only after the conducted focus group discussion, requires a modification of my conceptual framework in order to display a final product of the model. Furthermore, the empirical data involves additional new topics (nationalism vs patriotism) arising from the findings of the focus group in relation to CIs. Thus, it can be subsumed that the implication of the abductive approach leads to new insights of the master thesis.

In addition, the thesis' data analysis, inspired by the essence of abductive reasoning, has a reflexive essence when new aspects are revealed. This is considered as a deliberate research strategy based on the chosen approach of starting with certain theory that I have to adjust after gathering both theoretical and empirical data.

The following technical specifications of the project are related to the empirical research. They present the reason for choosing the focus group approach along with a scheme with general information about the 9 participants that were involved in the discussion and their connection to the EU Cultural Institutes active in Bulgaria.

4.4. Research method and data collection

As mentioned above, the current project follows a qualitative research method. Subsequently, major part of the data collection is provided by the type of qualitative research methodology known as a focus group technique. The focus group method is defined as a structured discussion of several participants, managed by a facilitator and/or a moderator, to generate data on fairly defined topic (Masadeh, 2012).

Following the logic of this certain method, the paper's approach includes organizing a group of people who have certain experience and knowledge about the EU Cultural Institutes that are active in Bulgaria and therefore can be interviewed about that experience. Therefore, the target group selected to participate in the current focus group is determined by the purpose of the study – representatives of various entities and organizations (municipal advisors, deputies of Non-governmental organizations, journalists) that are closely related to the active European National Institutes for Culture and represent the Bulgarian public.
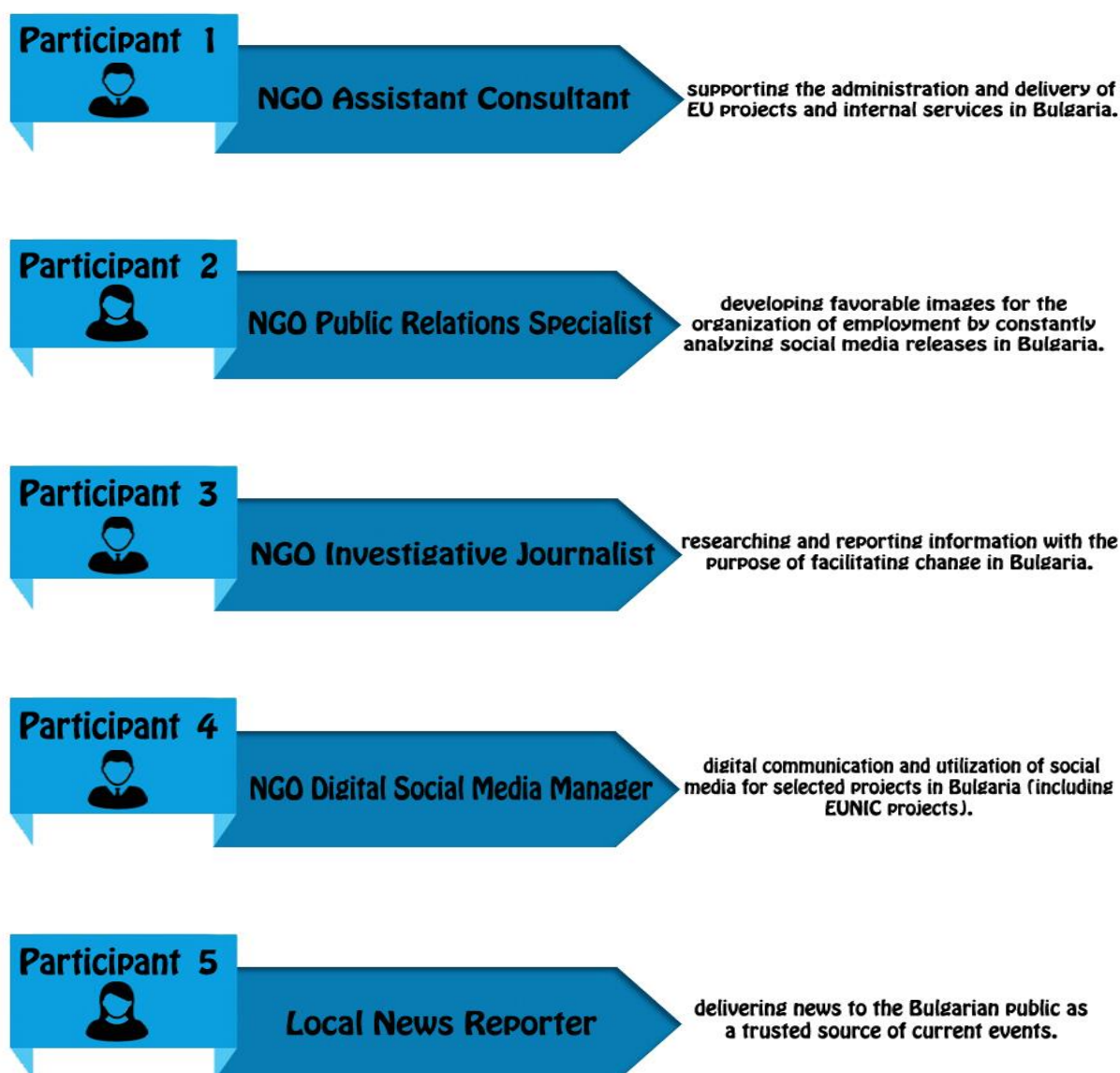
The focus group offers me an opportunity to study the ways in which certain individuals collectively make sense of the way EU CIs in Bulgarian MS are communicating images and construct meaning around it. It is a central tenet of the paper's theoretical positions like interpretivism that the process of coming to terms with social phenomena is not undertaken by individuals in isolation from each other. Instead, it is something that occurs in interaction and discussion with others. In this sense, focus group is of great use to the thesis – it reflects the processes through which meaning is constructed in everyday life and to that extent can be regarded as "more naturalistic than individual interviews" (Wilkinson, 1998).
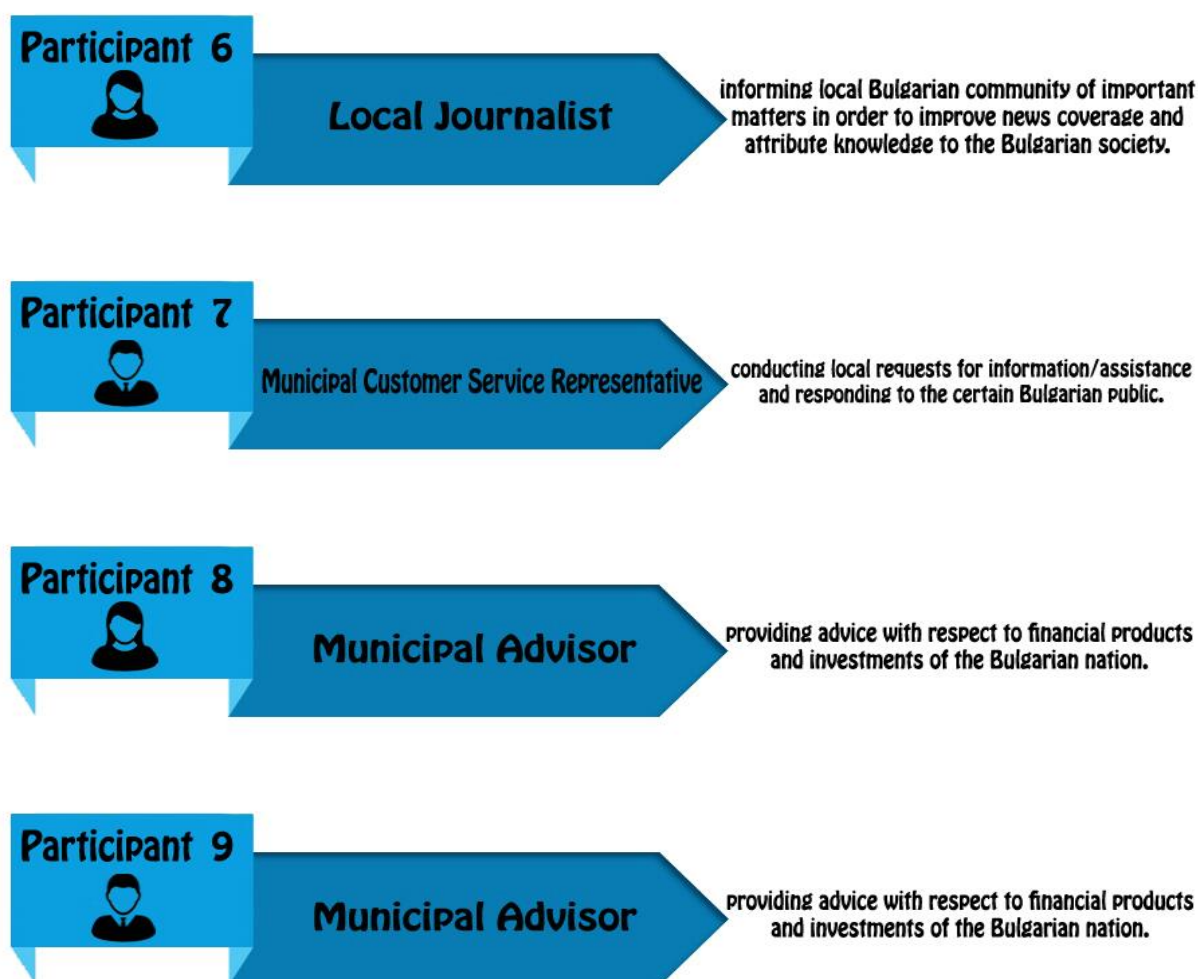
It is vital to state that while facilitating the focus group conference I had been provided with assistant moderator to take notes of the discussion since I was not allowed to make a recording

of the interviewing that has been conducted in the Municipality of Lovech, Bulgaria. The reason stands behind certain regulations and preferences for anonymity from some of the individuals.

However, there are no restrictions for me to present a scheme with specific details about each of the focus group participants. Some of their credentials and influence as part of the Bulgarian society are also considered. This information allows me to introduce this group of people as "Bulgarian Public" as it will be explained below.

The scheme with information about the focus group individuals includes their gender, job category and main accountabilities they encounter with Bulgarian public/Cultural Institutes/International communication services:

Participant 1

NGO Assistant Consultant — supporting the administration and delivery of EU projects and internal services in Bulgaria.

Participant 2

NGO Public Relations Specialist — developing favorable images for the organization of employment by constantly analyzing social media releases in Bulgaria.

Participant 3

NGO Investigative Journalist — researching and reporting information with the purpose of facilitating change in Bulgaria.

Participant 4

NGO Digital Social Media Manager — digital communication and utilization of social media for selected projects in Bulgaria (including EUNIC projects).

Participant 5

Local News Reporter — delivering news to the Bulgarian public as a trusted source of current events.

Figure 2: Focus Group Information Scheme, Source: Own creation

There are few points worth noting in relation to the organization of the focus group:

- The selection of these certain individuals with various backgrounds of employment that are all relevant for the focus group discussion would not have been possible without the great assistance and support of The Municipality of Lovech, Bulgaria.
- Among the NGO representatives of the focus group, there are some directly working in collaboration with the British Council and Alliance Françoise both located in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital.
- A Bulgarian ambassador who would have made another elaborate contribution to the focus group discussion was also invited. However, he had to cancel the meeting due to fully-booked schedule.

Generally, the individuals that participated in the focus group of my project have involvement in both the private and public sectors of Bulgaria. They work and communicate in collaboration

with Bulgarian people, representatives of EU Cultural Institutes; they deliver local, national and international news to the Bulgarian community; they work on common EU projects and present the Bulgarian perspective beyond borders; they live, work and accept certain social reality as members of their motherland – Bulgaria. Hence, it can be concluded that the 9 focus group members validly stand for "Bulgarian public" and are therefore illustrated as such in the conceptual model of the thesis. However, it is realized that such a small group of people cannot fully represent the Bulgarian public, it is rather seen as a selection of certain Bulgarian individuals who are stating opinions and arguments based on the social reality in Bulgaria, thus partly standing for Bulgarian public.

4.5. Validity and reliability

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research as a whole has been constantly critiqued by the lack of consensus for assessing its quality, robustness and justifying the methods adopted (Leung, 2015). Hence, as a qualitative research which contains subjective and interpretive data, it is essential for the current project to ensure validity and reliability.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define validity and reliability as two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about when designing a paper, analyzing results and determining the quality of the study.

Validity in research has a reference to the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) among others differentiate internal and external validity. The internal validity is associated with securing the findings reflected within the context of a given study, while external validity addresses the certain extent to which the findings can be applied in other researches.

In the case of the master thesis, both internal and external validity are taken into consideration. The internal validity of the project includes the creation of own conceptual model based on the theories used for the research. The paper's framework presents the process of EU CIs promoting images to the Bulgarian public with certain influential factors such as globalization, social media, the cultural perspective and the East-West dimension. Furthermore, the abductive reasoning applied within the project assure that the findings are not merely a collection of personal opinions subject to my bias as a researcher. By means of the abductive approach, the initial theoretical perspective gets adjusted when the empirical data is introduced. Consequently, the East-West cultural differences (and other new topics) have been generated

as an additional aspect based on the knowledge of the focus group participants. This has led to the modification of the conceptual model and the introduction of new terms relevant to the EUNIC communication of images in Bulgaria. Hence, the internal validity of the paper is determined as secured since the findings are utilized in practice and incorporated into the final delivery of the project.

The research's external validity refers to the application of the topic outside the context of my study. The promotion of images coming from some of the most developed European Institutes of Culture (as discussed in the background information chapter) and the communication and functioning of EUNIC in Bulgaria present a complex process of international and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, it is considered that the result of my study is applicable to the work of EU Cultural Institutes in other nations even beyond the borders of the European Union since the CIs are present all over the world and facilitate multinational groups of people.

Moving further to reliability, it concerns the consistency and stability of a given research as well as the investigator's ability to collect and record accurate information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Accordingly, it is essential to present reliable data about the focus group participants and the relation of their background activities with the current topic. The methodology chapter of the project offers a descriptive scheme with relevant information about each individual. The participants are well aware of certain activities that CIs undertake and have a pre-given knowledge about their goals and missions. Hence, the illustrated focus group scheme not only provides reliability on the matter, but also secure a similar, ontological position of the individuals so to present a proper version of their social reality in Bulgaria when EU Cultural Institutes are involved.

4.6. Data limitations

The main disadvantage of qualitative approaches is that the findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses can. This is because the findings of the research are not tested to discover whether they are statistically significant or due to chance. Therefore, this section of the master thesis outlines some limitations of the collected data.

Firstly, there are differences of tradition, of economic status, of dealing with "the other". Therefore, the collected data within this project would have been more comprehensive if the opinions of more Bulgarian people with various backgrounds were taken into consideration

with the purpose of more broadly analyzing how the nation perceive and define EUNIC including their positive characteristics, basic problems in the functioning, level of public awareness - basically all the images that the institutions impose to the Bulgarian public.

Furthermore, in order to collect the data for the paper's research, the focus group of experts from certain institutions and organizations is exclusively selected as a major source of information. To some extent this limits the applicability of the thesis' findings, as within other circumstances and a focus group setting with experts from different areas of expertise, there is the possibility for the findings to be partially valid or not valid at all.

However, the purpose of this thesis is to present the findings as an inspiration for researchers to elaborate and further develop topics relevant to the EU CI's cultural relations in Bulgaria, the EUNIC international/intercultural promotion and communication of images, the aims and development of Cultural Institutes.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

After elaborating on the affiliation of EUNIC, CIs and Bulgarian MS and defining the qualitative scope of the research, the current chapter analyses the findings of the focus group discussion and their connection to the theoretical perspective of the paper.

With respect to interpretivism and phenomenology, the starting point of the data analysis presents the idea of my social reality with its relevance to the topic before the interaction with other individuals. The purpose of stating my perspective is to encounter the internal logic that I have about Cultural Institutes and in this manner to develop it further by analyzing the focus group discussion with respect to my conceptual framework. Hence, the following, initial considerations of mine are as follows:

In the contemporary world telecommunication revolution has incredibly increased the information streams. Governments and their institutions are exceptionally careful with the imposition of images. The good image of a country leads to the enhancement of foreign investments, enriches the possibilities for import-export of stocks, stimulates tourism and so on. Creating a positive image through a Cultural Institute for the public – government and nation – is a fundamental assignment of each state. In order to accomplish such a task, the Cultural Institutes are among the most powerful instruments due to the fact they can successfully promote desirable images.

The increasing role of Cultural Institutions for sustainable development is associated with realization of activities related to the communication of cultural heritage. The purpose of Chapter 5 is to assess strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the future development of EU Cultural Institutes by analyzing the images they promote in Bulgaria from the perspective of the focus group presented as Bulgarian public.

As I have outlined in the literature review, the concept of "CIs promoting images" tends to be a phenomenon that is not limited to just a single meaning, it is more with the idea of providing space for interpretations and thoughts by the individual. Depending on the concrete situation, accepting a certain image could be understood as the utility which a certain Cultural Institute guarantees to the Bulgarian public, the reasonable promotion of cultural events, the institutions' norms and rules of operating as well as their basic characteristics and accomplishments.

Due to this diversity in how one sees the concept of culture and image-creation within the scope of my thesis, the focus group that combines interviewing, participant observation and group interaction has been conducted in the Municipality of Lovech, Bulgaria. The purpose of the focus group I organized consisting of nine participants from various backgrounds – municipal advisors, journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations working with Cultural Institutes – is to find out what would be their opinion on this abstract matter and the extent to which it would differ in comparison to what I have already depicted in the literature review chapter. It is also important to note that a permanent written record of the group discussion could not be provided due to a time pressured research situation that involves fairly mundane issues (e.g., advertising copy testing) and anonymity from participant's side. Therefore, transcription is not available within the current project. However, the facilitation of further analysis is provided with the cooperation of assistant moderator who was appointed from the Municipality to take notes throughout the discussion.

The focus group discussion began with open questions to obtain participants' overall orientation toward the master thesis' topic. By including general questions about the Cultural Institutes along with the perception and communication of images and culture, it was analytically interesting to observe the social reality of the participants as well as which aspects are top of mind and expressed first in the interviewing. Consequently, they are presented in sub-categories below, depending on their significance and subject-matter in relation to the thesis.

5.1. Perception of Cultural Institutions

It is clear for the participants of the focus group that France, Germany, the United Kingdom, implemented the first Cultural Institutes in Europe as a whole. As one of the municipal advisors opened the discussion, it was stated that, for instance, all foreign CIs in Bulgaria originate from traditionally strong European countries with complex bureaucratic systems and usually have significant Cultural Institute networks worldwide.

A representative of a non-governmental organization additionally added as a fact that the French Cultural Institutes is composed of around 150 cultural centers and institutes and more than 200 services for cultural cooperation and action while Bulgaria has only 8 CIs abroad owing to the fact that the government does not have enough financial instruments to cover the costs of more Cultural Institutes abroad.

The municipal advisor nodded in approval and continued with his thought by explaining that the European Union could become larger and larger, because of the cultural cooperation, the diffusion of national images, national art and the communication of knowledge and information in other states. One of the participants further developed the point of view by stating the European enlargements in 2004 and 2007 as an example. Following the collapse of their regimes in 1989, many former communist countries from central and Eastern Europe became EU members in 2 waves. Their cultural cooperation with the historically democratic Western Europe was tremendous partly due to the institutions in question. This statement was well accepted by the whole group since there was an instant of silence in the assembly hall. While observing their looks of agreement and reflection, I started thinking that the conceptual model, created in the literature review as an incentive to this project, has nothing about the East – West cultural understandings and differences even though the aspect of national images and the cross-cultural dimensions of Hofstede are included as aspects that elaborate on the cultural distinction among nations. Hence, I have decided to elaborate more on the distinction of Eastern and Western states in the sense of investigating whether it is related with how CIs are perceived. So I slightly shifted the focus to the aspect of nationalism.

"Would you say that nowadays there is still this "the East meets the West" distinction of how a nation, along with its Cultural Institutes, is perceived? "

At this point, it is accurate to share that another reason for choosing the semi-structured model of interviewing a focus group is exactly the appearance of such questions (like the one above) that were not originally included in my agenda as a moderator.

Once again, the person to firstly give an answer to my question was among the municipal representatives of the group discussion. He claimed that the modern nations have their basis on pre-existing collective identities, even though only with the evolution of modern states they fully present what a nation is today. The municipal advisor further developed his argument by clarifying that nationalism is the framework in which the modern era produced history's most enduring and successful social experiment in large-scale democracy with Cultural Institutes being just a fraction of them. Therefore, the idea of Western democracy is correlated with the Eastern nations in his opinion, considering that nationalist movements are enforcing the democratic ideal.

Even if I considered this statement as relevant for the CIs since democratization creates a good framework for the development of culture, the point of view divagates from the main scope of the master thesis.

Precisely, I was thinking how to shift the excessively political focus of the municipal advisor and facilitate another question of mine within the essence of nationalism, when one of the journalists of the selected focus group continued the discussion by asserting that nationalism differs from setting to setting, dependent on the social context. She gave a concrete example stating that in Bulgaria there are still significant differences in the perception between Western and Eastern countries – a cleavage that according to her is relevant for Cultural Institutes as well. The journalist's explanation was that such a division is based on the fact that in Western Europe there is a better resemblance between border, political discourse and cultural, linguistic features. Therefore, it is easier for such nations to impose their national images abroad through EUNIC, while in Eastern countries such as Bulgaria this overlapping is not applied to such an extent – a situation that can lead to differences over what constitute a strong national image for a given country – as the journalist concluded.

The municipal advisor who originally started discussing this certain topic not only agreed but also added that the journalist's point of view gives way to the interpretation that "an integrative Western patriotism is to some extent opposed to emotionally disruptive Eastern nationalism".

I found this particularity of his as debatable since Western countries are also facing contemporary issues, e.g. the Brexit situation of UK and the uncertainty of how efficient would be for the nation to leave the European Union. Both the British government and the main UK opposition (thus officials and public) are concerned for the international relationship between the UK and the EU after eventual Brexit. Hence, it can be said as a contra argument that in certain situations Western nations can be also referred as "emotional".

However, it is perceived that the argument of the municipal representative, though exaggerated, has the purpose of contrasting and emphasizing more on the problematic situation of Eastern countries and namely Bulgaria, than to elaborate further on the western ideological point of view. Therefore, I asked him to further explain what can be done about this opposition of Western patriotism and Eastern nationalism, as it also relates to EUNIC and the involvement of Western CIs active in Bulgaria and the information they communicate to the Bulgarian society.

The employee of Lovech Municipality answered with a strong, optimistic tone of speaking that he has a strong belief that cultural diversity is a very powerful asset, an added value and an opportunity for European societies. His suggestion also included the idea that people should be more giving and open-minded to others from different cultures.

An NGO representative continued the topic with the thought that our cultural influences form the way in which we see the world. Hence, a variety of viewpoints, a wide-ranging personal and professional experience of an international team can offer new perspectives that inspire people to see the workplace and the world differently. This argument can be associated with the cross-cultural dimensions of Hofstede's research that is applied within the theoretical perspective of the project. More specifically, the opinion of the NGO deputy is apprehended as relevant to the diversity of social, cultural settings that individuals encounter as illustrated with the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede that are profiling certain cultures. Hence, it can be assumed that cultural differences are influential factor of how certain society like the Bulgarian one functions when perceiving information shared by EU CIs in the host country. Moreover, this leads to affirmation that culture has an effect on how CIs promotion of images is perceived by the Bulgarian public as the conceptual model of the thesis suggests.

Another journalist (who has not participated until this moment) apparently related to the discussion and stated that multiple voices, perspectives, and personalities bouncing off one another can give rise to out-of-the-box thinking. He even related his statement to the essence of my research, by adding that an advancement of multicultural workforce can give to the Cultural Institutions and EUNIC an important edge of how Bulgarian people perceive them.

This certain discussion suggesting that people should be, most of all, humane and open-hearted to others; that people should work together in a diverse and inclusive social environment so to ensure the development of new ideas, more creativity, even more passion, gave me an inspiration not only for the sake of the thesis, but also as a human being.

In order to relate and keep this pleasant vibe of cultural unification that was implied in me by the focus group, my next set of questions was related exactly to the aspect of culture and its influence on the way EUNIC communicate and promote images.

5.2. Cultural perspective and adjustments toward the Cultural Institutes

After discussing few basic questions about culture in general, it has been pointed out that the term is often associated with civilization. In addition, the conversation clearly concluded that culture is related to main concepts like values, beliefs, expressive symbols, etc. In this essence I wanted to investigate if the idea of Cultural Institutes is also related to a strong relation between culture and society.

A municipal advisor presented a very interesting point of view. He distinguished between "high" and "popular" culture. His assertion presumed that high culture is representing the products made by the cultural elite with examples such as the French cinema, the opera music and poetry. The municipal deputy's point of view also classified the popular culture as a one that stands for mass people and subordinate classes, giving an illustration with Hollywood cinema, pop music and sci-fi. Focusing on the cultural institutes and the images they create for people, he further disclosed that these institutions should include promotion of events that are presentative for both high and popular culture so there is a wider and more durable communication of images to people.

A colleague of the municipal advisor added that the cultural and communicational connection of the institutes that is passed to the general public emphasize on the aspects of interpretation among different social groups of people who may construct a variety of meanings rooted in culture, media and society. He also stated that perceiving images might also relate to fields such as conflict, decision-making, language behavior, intergroup relations and cultural values. Therefore, the municipal representative analyzed that the Cultural Institutions draw attention to the usefulness of images in exploring communicational processes as a tool of preventing the effect that pre-conceived prejudices may have on distorting reality for people and therefore, distorting communication. His statement about images, as a type of communication in various fields, is relevant to the tested theory of Mitchel who not only presents multiple examples of the imagery process in order to grasp its richness but also associate the phenomenon with kind of language. Hence the empirical findings confirm the theoretical perspective and the consideration of "images" as a communication tool that is part of the dialogue between CIs and Bulgarian MS.

After few moments of silence, one of the journalists, probably driven by her professional strive for facilitating questions, turned to the municipal advisors by asking what might the CIs undertake as actions in order to reduce the stereotyped views of people.

The employee of Lovech Municipality, who originally impelled this discussion with his knowledge and view on "high" and "popular" culture, immediately replied to the question of the journalist like he was prepared for it. His words followed the logic that by understanding the fundamental value differences between members of all cultures, the learning styles of students from all societies, and the facilitating styles of participants in different speech communities, the Cultural Institutes can better understand how members from different cultures synchronize their worldviews and modify their communication patterns to adapt and adjust to one another on both the interpersonal level and the intergroup-intercultural communication level.

Luckily for me, another perspective was provided by a participant working for a foreign non-governmental organization. He initially stated that under the given accent of globalization, the focus cannot be solely around the nation states any more. Conversely, international cultural exchange cannot be separated from national interests either. Therefore, the NGO representative agreed with the municipal advisor that the influence of public, private and regional actors in the realization of concrete cultural exchange programs of cultural institutes is doubtlessly rising. Also the need for an enhanced engagement in "people-to-people diplomacy" along with a deep understanding of international cultural exchange has never been more significant.

As of great interest to the current paper, the NGO representative defined this exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture as cultural diplomacy. In particular, he underlined the significance of public diplomacy since the Cultural Institutes' influence grows out of culture, out of domestic values and policies, and out of foreign policy. The non-governmental organization's employee emphasized on the fact that short-term responses can be fine-tuned by the CIs through using broadcast capabilities and narrowcasting on the Internet – a necessary step to raise a nation's profile. He also underlined that the most effective communication often occurs not by distant broadcast but in face-to-face contacts. The participant of the focus group concluded his statement by acknowledging that cultural diplomacy refers among nations and their people to foster mutual understandings. His

statement corresponded with the direction of my conceptual model, as globalization and social media were included in the NGO deputy's point of view as major points.

Based on his comments, I imagined cultural diplomacy as a set of cultural activities implying that a nation's idea of itself is best represented by Cultural Institutes so as to gather and inspire people from all over the globe despite political differences and cross borders. By already perceiving this concept as a new piece of information that would be included in the modification of my conceptual framework, I decided to examine more specifics of cultural diplomacy by asking what are the adjustments of EUNIC and the CIs towards securing cultural diplomacy.

The only NGO's representative, who had not participated profoundly in the discussion so far, took the word by giving a concrete example with the case of Bulgaria. He answered that all major areas covered by cultural diplomacy are present for the foreign Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria, for instance, areas such as the representation of states, the awareness of international climate, undertaking initiatives, an ability of order and change, amending a wise body of international policies, etc. Being even more specific, he explained with another example that the French Cultural Institutes represent the centralized, state funded model and France is among the countries with most influential communication of images since the Bulgarian network of CIs abroad is mostly based on the French model, though its way of functioning is partly more de-concentrated and more local actors are involved presently.

I found this latter example as a very suitable for the purpose of the master thesis because one of my initial aims about the discussion with this focus group was to find out exactly how influential the Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria can be. The fact that such an accurate data was provided from a point of view which was not planned in the set of questions I initially had, made me eager to elaborate even more on the matter of cultural diplomacy.

Heading towards the same NGO deputy, I asked what he would consider as the most influential aspect of cultural diplomacy with the aim to mostly keep the discussion on-going. However, he made another useful point by stating that cultural exchange is a major part of the cultural diplomacy in the operation of CIs in general. It can take place in domains like art, sport, literature, music, science, cuisine, having the aim of building and strengthening relations of peace and friendship among different nations and states, according to that certain participant of the focus group.

The aspect of cultural exchange was a suitable argument to make me change the focus of the discussion to the more concrete functioning and initiatives of the Cultural Institutes. This was also to be my last set of questions due to time limitation since the discussion in one of the assembly halls of Lovech Municipality was appointed for only two hours.

5.3. The mission of Cultural Institutes as communicators of images

After a moment of reflection, I asked the focus group participants what are the purpose, activities and collaboration of the Cultural Institutes, so to serve as a wire of cultural exchange.

A long discussion was formed with participation from all sides (in professional manner) of the focus group. I was able to categorize the main aims of the Cultural Institutes according to the participants in the following way:

- Advancement of languages, historical and cultural creations of their host country
- Promotion of the performance of scientific and cultural projects
- Stimulation of the dialogue with people from other nations

From what was declared in the group discussion, the CIs should maintain and develop cultural and spiritual relation within foreign societies, with the aim of cherishing the language, traditions and cultural identity. Thus, a national interest should be achieved and promoted in order for a nation to have positive images of the country that cultural institutes represent. This is an accurate finding for the discussion that is to follow in the next chapter of the project. Furthermore, it is related to the initial idea I had for national images in my conceptual model. Hence, my notion for the way Cultural Institutes communicate images to societies partly correspond to the analysis of the focus group participants.

To continue with, the discussion clearly distinguished the major activities of the Cultural Institutes that represent foreign nations in Bulgaria. They named cultural events such as exhibitions of paintings, sculptures, photography; artistic performances of theatrical troops and dance formations, poetry, etc. Additionally, it was pointed out that conferences and debates on various matters, from artistic to political issues, scholarships in foreign countries, accommodation for fellows, promotion of cultural magazines and language courses are also among the initiatives undertaken by the Cultural Institutes.

As discussed mostly from the non-governmental organizations' associates, the Cultural Institutes have been generally founded with the purpose of strengthening the national images of a host country and to be considered abroad as strong, developed nations. However, the present institutions in Bulgaria are Alliance Françoise, Goethe Institute, British Council, and Cervantes Institute – all created by well developed countries. Therefore, according to the focus group participants, the purpose of it is "opening towards Bulgaria". It was further elaborated from one of the foreign NGO's representatives that if the young generations of people are to co-exist and interact with people from other faiths and countries - no matter if it is France, Italy, Bulgaria or another nation - open and flexible attitudes, as well as values that unite us around our common humanity are vital. Therefore, the mission of Cultural Institutes all around Europe, presenting different nations and cultures, is related to a better cultural integration of the future generations of multinational societies.

It is also evident how important the role of the Cultural Institutes is in the integration process among states since they contribute to the reestablishment of more peaceful international relations. One of the municipal advisors stated that through the opening toward other cultures, the differences can be known and understood, which eventually might lead to better multilingual communication. The foreign CIs, as he continued, opt for collaboration with a series of organizations and institutions from the host country - Bulgaria in this case. This cooperation includes Bulgarian universities, cultural organizations, theaters, exhibition assemblies, cinemas, music halls, etc. Consequently, this partnership, manifested by means of cultural projects not only shapes certain images in the minds of people, but it also increases the visibility of cultural organizations among the society.

The last topic of the discussion was related to the implementation of Cultural Institutes in Bulgaria. I classified the information on this matter by dividing it in four main points based on the generated knowledge from the focus group. The idea of the Cultural Institutes is perceived as follows:

1) The diffusion of national languages. The cultural institutes can simultaneously represent a language school for students, formation school for language teachers and certificate centers for the release of language exams, e.g. IELTS in English.

2) The Cultural Institutes work on the representation and promotion of national culture, society, customs, cultural heritage (e.g. fine arts, films, books, traditions, etc.) by facilitating cultural events

3) Since culture is also considered as knowledge, science, the Cultural Institutes offer many scholarships so to attract foreign wisdom within their national studies

4) The possibility of the cultural institutions in Bulgaria to also diffuse certain convictions and beliefs.

After having significant points in this part of the discussion, the assistant moderator gave me a sign that the meeting is about to end. Therefore, satisfied with the received points of view, I clarified to the representatives of the focus group that we are going to finish with a short summary of the discussion which would allow verification on the analyzed matters.

The focus group discussion concluded that the foreign Cultural Institutes active in Bulgaria impose strong national images and even if the initial objectives of the Western states might seem "egoist", all the common policies and operations of EUNIC and the CIs have contributed to an objective far more important in the long term: a better reopening of Europe towards the Bulgarian MS.

Last but not least, after all participants of the focus group left the assembly, the analysis sequence continued with an immediate debriefing with the assistant moderator. After making a deliberate check of the notes to ensure everything is accurate and the field notes are complete, I continued the analytic sequence by discussing the main points of the focus group event with the assistant moderator so to assimilate the knowledge of this focus group discussion and to form a more solid base for my analysis.

After the event in the Municipality building I began working on the analyses chapter straight away since I didn't have an opportunity to record the focus group interview and while still having the fresh memory and impressions of it, I started with the writings on this chapter of the master thesis.

After revising and completing all the points of the project's analysis, a strong base for discussion and modification of my conceptual model was made which is to be enlisted in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Within the following chapter, it will be outlined to what extent the data from my analysis matches with the considerations made in the literature review. Furthermore, a modified, improved version of the conceptual model that was presented at the end of Chapter Two will be provided so that a better comprehension of how EUNIC function as communicator of images in Bulgaria takes place.

The literature review suggested that the investigated concept of "Cultural Institutes promoting images" tends to be a rather abstract and very hard to define phenomenon which is not limited to only one specific meaning. Therefore, it could be approached from multiple angles depending on the concrete situation. This is in line with my analyses as all nine respondents of the focus group perceived the communication of images from Cultural Institutes as either in the promotion of languages, the encouragement of multilingual cultural and scientific projects, the advancement of multicultural workforce, as a tool of preventing pre-conceived prejudices etc., instead of limiting themselves to only one specific meaning and interpretation of the matter. The analyzed data is also in line with the epistemological view of interpretivism and phenomenology in the methodology, as the discussion concerned questions of how the selected focus group participants are making sense of the Cultural Institutes based on their reality and the things they experience in the everyday life. This allows for the empirical findings to represent the internal logic of the master thesis' subject and to reach comprehension regarding this social world.

Moving onward, the literature review presented the notion of culture as a social and cognitive processing with the purpose of linking culture to individuals and emphasizing the number and diversity of social settings that individuals encounter. It was concluded by the focus group participants that culture is related not only to main concepts like values, beliefs, etc., but also the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture defined as cultural diplomacy. As it became evident from the analysis of the data, cultural diplomacy refers among nations and their people to foster mutual understandings and can be emphasized by the EU Cultural Institutes through the usage of digital social media tools. This point is vital for the purpose of the master thesis as it presents a point that corresponds to the idea of social media presented in Chapter 2. The latter aspect presents exactly the idea that social media

consist of various activities, including video sharing, texting, blogging and their effectiveness relies on the activities and combination of tools that an audience would be attracted to.

The next vital aspect to discuss is the concept of imagery that was presented in the literature review. The theory that I used within the project presents the idea that images must be understood as a kind of language; instead of providing a transparent window on the world, images are presented as a sort of sign, a mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification. The data displayed this as a valid point, as it was analyzed that cultural and communicational connection of EUNIC is passed to the notion and interpretation of different social groups of people who may construct a variety of meanings rooted in culture, society, values, etc. The perception of images was also related to conflicts, decision-making, language behavior, intergroup relations, cultural values, etc., which makes another strong point to conceptualize images as a sort of language. Therefore, my understanding on the matter includes the usefulness of images in exploring communication processes as crucial for the further development of CIs. Moreover, after acknowledging that the phenomenon of images includes an incredible variety of things that go by this name, the image theory has been developed mostly along national images since the thesis's focus is on the influence of Cultural Institutes in Bulgarian society.

It was clarified that nationalism is the framework in which modern era produced history's most enduring and successful social experiment in large-scale democracy with the integration and implementation of Western Cultural Institutes in Eastern Europe and vice versa. Additionally, it was clarified that it can be still talked about certain East-West distinction since in Western Europe there is a better resemblance between borders, political discourses and cultural, linguistic features. Therefore, it is easier for such nations to impose their national images abroad through institutions such as the CIs, while in Eastern nations like Bulgaria, this overlapping is not applied to such an extent. That illustration of "the East meets the West" was analyzed in the previous chapter as an aspect that brings a new, external scope which had not been included neither in the literature review, nor in my initial conceptual model, even though the aspect of national images was part of the general idea of the priory framework. Hence, this point is included in the modification of the conceptual model presented below.

Last but not least, the process of globalization was also recognized as related aspect to the subject of the current master thesis, and was therefore included in the literature review as a phenomenon that is reshaping how we have traditionally studied and perceived the social

world and human cultures. This is also a valid point of the findings, since the focus group recognized the new communication and information technologies brought within the era of globalization as a method for the Cultural Institutes to influence the imposition of images to the Bulgarian society and consequently to maximize distinguishable images.

After interpreting the findings and analyzing the clash of theory and empirical findings (summarizing the results), I came up with a new model, which uses as a base the one presented at the end of the literature review chapter. However, I have made some modifications as well as adding the East-West dimension based on the empirical findings with the purpose to fulfill the picture of how Cultural Institutes function as communicators of images in Bulgaria.

6.1. Final Conceptual Model
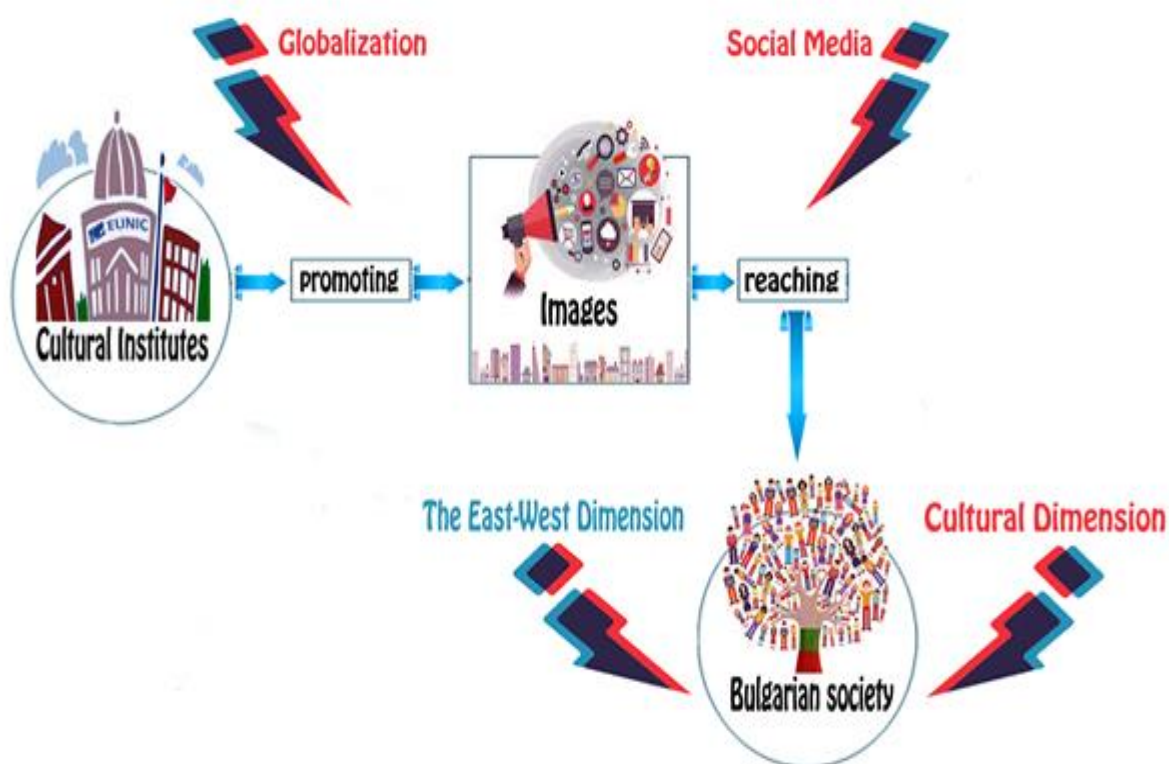
Figure 3: Final framework, Source: Own creation

Based on the literature review, the primary conceptual framework and the focus group discussion and analysis, the final model of the paper is established.

Compared to the old framework, the modified one illustrates a more comprehensive idea of what influence the CIs promotion of images when they reach the Bulgarian MS. Beside the cultural dimension, the current model presents the East-West Dimension as another influential factor when concerning impositions of images for the Bulgarian public.

My updated theoretical model is considered as the new insight of the research. The model reinforces certain processes that are already known within their field of study. However, the combination of these processes and their relation to certain society as the Bulgarian one is considered as a unique contribution. The initial purpose of this model is to fulfill the picture of how EU Cultural Institutes function as promoters of images in Bulgaria. The described process and illustrated model are realized to be in its early, basic stages and investigations but the framework might serve as potential Bulgarian mechanism of cooperation between EU Institutions and the Bulgarian Member State. After all, EUNIC supports ways and projects about fostering mutual work of EU MS. Furthermore, the model might also be related to the cultural relations of Bulgaria in the international arena. Beside developing more contemporary images among other EU Member States with the support of digital tools and social media, my model could also suggest for the Bulgarian society that the cultural perspective might be a way to improve certain diplomatic relations and reach much more comprehensive intercultural dialogue with Western nations whilst appreciating other cultures, values and traditions. Hence, the model can be also interpreted as a view to fostering mutual understanding and trust among people not only in Bulgaria but from all over the globe.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The notion of images and how images are generated and perceived, is an important subject not only for the current master thesis, but also for today's world where culture is reflected in values, norms and practices. The term "image" is associated with the mental perception of a person towards an object, an individual, an organization, etc. Consequently, a strong, positive image is beneficial for any institution to achieve its objectives and to imply understanding among all people of interest. Among the developers of cultural integration among nations, one has an essential role in this process: the system of Cultural Institutes. Those specific organizations have the capacity to present certain images and preserve national cultures abroad, while creating an international dialogue through EUNIC with other countries.

Cultural Institutes are distinguished within the frame of the project as a key for a further multinational integration, as different nations have the capability to strengthen their cultural relations through this specific set of organizations. Indeed, the establishment of EU Cultural Institutes has strengthened international dialogue between different member states.

Moreover, the focus group that I organized for the purpose of the current thesis outlined EUNIC and the Cultural Institutes as communicators of images in a number of ways. The CIs offer a comprehensive range of exemplary educational programs in Bulgaria that foster and sustain an environment that promotes academic achievements and support cultural diversity. The institutions also promote and encourage a supportive and friendly environment that is welcoming for, and attractive to people of any race, ethnicity, nationality, etc. Additionally, the Cultural Institutes enhance further support for international programs and scholarships in the Bulgarian MS as well as stimulating the existence of community that values diversity through educational, cultural and social programs.

In conclusion, I would say that through this project new insights on how CIs promote images were provided. Furthermore, it was illustrated through my conceptual model that different factors such as the role of globalization and social media, as well as the aspect of culture and the East-West dimension, do have a major impact and are associated with the process of cultural relations.

With respect to the implications of my master thesis, I would say that the most important thing which needs to be considered by representatives of Cultural Institutes concerns the

appropriate and effective management of the multilateral relationship with people from different cultures, so there is a desirable communication of images from the institutions. One way of doing this is through a constant two-way communication process, as through a CI may be able to detect a cultural misunderstanding, thus the imposition of negative images for a given part of society and within a short period of time to find the best possible solution in order to retrieve desirable images. The second way in which the communication of images might be improved for Cultural Institutes, relates to people's involvement and active participation in the process of cultural communication (events, exhibitions, concerts, etc.). By providing more knowledge and opinions, the relationship "people – cultural institutes" may grow stronger, so the promotion and sharing of images is more specific and comprehensive.

Last but not least, I believe that a similar study including participants from more countries of origin could be conducted, so as to have individuals with even more diverse social backgrounds than ones of the current focus group. Hence, more universal understanding of how the Cultural Institutes generate and impose images to certain publics might be reached. After all, the purpose of this master thesis is to serve as an incentive for other qualitative researchers exploring topics relevant to the cultural relations in Bulgaria; the functioning of EUNIC and Cultural Institutes; even the facilitation and management of international and intercultural dialogue.

Master Thesis' References

Appelbaum, R. & Robinson, W. (2005). *Critical Globalization Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Bernoff, J. & Li, C. (2008). *Harnessing the Power of the Oh-So-Social Web*. MIT Sloan Management Review: Cambridge. Vol 49, Issue 3. Retrieved from: https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/harnessing-the-power-of-the-ohsosocial-web/

Blaikie, N. (2000). Designing Social Research. The Logic of Anticipation. Polity Press, Cambridge.

Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. (2nd edition). Oxford University Press, New York.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. (3rd edition). Oxford University Press, New York.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th edition*).* Oxford University Press, New York.

Bulgaria in Europe: 2018 and beyond: EUNIC Bulgaria. Retrieved from: https://www.eunicglobal.eu/projects/bulgaria-in-europe-2018-and-beyond

Callender, C. (2010). *Philosophy of Science and Metaphysics*. London: Continuum.

Chen, M. & Starosta, J. (2005). *Foundations of Intercultural Communication*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Dainton, M. & Zelley, E. (2011). *Applying Communication Theory for Professional Life*: A practical introduction (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dubois, A. & Gadde, L. (2014). Systematic Combining – A Decade Later. Journal of business research. Vol 67, Issue 6. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.03.036

Duignan, B. (2009). *Plato and Aristotle: How Do They Differ*? Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved from: https://www.britannica.com/story/plato-and-aristotle-how-do-they-differ

Earley, C. & Gibson, C. (1998). *Taking Stock in Our Progress on Individualism-Collectivism*: 100 years of solidarity and community. Journal of management. Vol 24, Issue 3. DOI:10.1177/014920639802400302

European Union National Institutes for Culture: Our story. Retrieved from: https://www.eunicglobal.eu/

Evans, D. (2008). *Social Media Marketing: An Hour a Day*. Wiley Publishing Inc. Indianapolis.

Feynman, R. (2009). *The Meaning of It All: Thoughts of a Citizen-Scientist.* Hachette, UK.

Flint, D. (2002, March 18). *Why national pride still has a home in the global village?* Retrieved from: https://www.scotsman.com/business/companies/tech/why-national-pride-still-has-a-home-in-the-global-village-1-607187

Furjesz, J. (2013). *The role of cultural institutes in the European integration.* Retrieved from: http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2013-06-iscd-italy/Judit_va_FRJSZ.pdf

Hofstede, G. (1983). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values*. Beverly Hills/London: Sage. Vol 4, Issue 4. DOI: 10.1177/017084068300400409

Hofstede, G. (1998). *Attitudes, Values and Organizational Culture*: Disentangling the Concepts. Vol 19, Issue 3. DOI: 10.1177/017084069801900305

Hofstede, G. (2011). *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context*. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture. Vol 2, Issue 1. DOI:10.9707/2307-0919.1014

Hofstede, G. (2017). *Hofstede Insights: Consulting/Training/Certification/Tooling*. Retrieved from: https://www.hofstede-insights.com/

House, R. (2004). *Culture, Leadership and Organizations*: The globe study of 62 societies: Sage.

Hudson, L. & Ozanne, J. (1988). *Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research*. Journal of Consumer Research. Vol 14, Issue 4. DOI:10.1086/209132

Khemlani, S. & Barbey, A. & Laird, P. (2014). *Causal reasoning with mental models*. Human Explanation: Psychology, Computation, and Neuroscience. DOI: 10.3389/fnhum.2014.00849

Lee, H. & Choi, K. (2005). *New Perspectives in Luxury Branding*. Journal of service marketing. Emerald Group Publishing.

Leung, L. (2015). *Validity, Reliability and Generalizability in Qualitative Research*. Vol 4, Issue 3. DOI: 10.4103/2249-4863.161306

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Masadeh, M. (2012). *Focus Group: Reviews and Practices*. International Journal of Applied Science and Technology. Vol 2, Issue 10. Retrieved from:
http://ijastnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_10_December_2012/9.pdf

McSweeney, B. (2002). *Hofstede's Model of National Cultural Differences and Their Consequences*: A triumph of faith – a failure of analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Minkov, M. & G. Hofstede (2012). *Hofstede's Fifth Dimension: New Evidence from the World Values Survey*. Vol 43, Issue 1. DOI: 10.1177/0022022110388567

Mitchell, W. (1984) What is an Image? New Literary History. Vol 15, Issue 3. Retrieved from: http://users.clas.ufl.edu/sdobrin/WJTMitchell_whatisanimage.pdf

Morrison, K. & Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (2011). *Research Methods in Education*. (7th edition). London; New York: Roultedge.

Movius, L. (2008). *Global Debates on the Right to Communicate*. University of Southern California, USA. Global Media Journal. Vol 7, Issue 13. Retrieved from:
http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/global-debates-on-the-right-to-communicate.pdf

Natanson, M. (2008). *The phenomenology of Alfred Schutz.* An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy. Vol 9, Issue 1-4. DOI: 10.1080/00201746608601455

Neuman, L. W. (2011). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (7th edition)*. Wisconsin, USA: University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Nye, J. (2006). *Think Again: Soft Power*. Foreign Policy. Retrieved from
https://foreignpolicy.com/2006/02/23/think-again-soft-power/

O'Neil, D. (2006, May 26). *What is Culture?* Retrieved from:
https://www2.palomar.edu/anthro/culture/culture_1.htm

Pieterse, J. (2012). *A Review of "Globalization and Culture: Global MéLange"* (2nd edition). Journal of International Consumer Marketing. Vol 24, Issue 3.
DOI:10.1080/08961530.2012.682043

Rearick, C. (1986). *Pleasures of the Belle Époque*: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-Of-The-Century France.

Richardson, T. (2012). *The rise of youth counter culture after World War II and the popularization of historical knowledge*: Then and now.

Schwartz, H. (1994). *Beyond individualism/collectivism*: New cultural dimensions of values.

Scoble, R. (2007). *Social Media Starfish*. Retrieved from: https://scobleizer.blog/2007/11/02/social-media-starfish/

Smits, Y. & Daubeuf, C. & Kern, P. (2016). KEA European Affairs. *Research for Cult Committee – European Cultural Institutes Abroad*. Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies. Culture and Education. DOI: 10.2861/0506

Stewart, D. & Shamdasani, N & Rook, D. (2007). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. (2nd edition). Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol 20. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2005). Retrieved from: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/

Triandis, H. (1989). *The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts*. University of Illinois: American psychological association.

Wang, H. (2003). *National Image Building and Chinese Foreign Policy*. China: An international journal. Vol 1, Issue 1. DOI: 10.1142/S0219747203000049

Wang, J. (2006). *Public Diplomacy and Global Business*. Journal of Business Strategy. Purdue University, Indiana. Vol.27, Issue 3. DOI: 10.1108/02756660610663826

Wilkinson, S. (1998). *Focus Group Methodology: A Review*. International Journal of Social Research Methodology. Vol 1, Issue 3. DOI: 10.1080/13645579.1998.10846874

Williams, R. (1985). *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford University Press, USA: Sage.